



**U.S. Department of State  
Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs  
Private Sector Exchange**

July 22, 2008

## Guidance Directive 2008-05

### Secondary School Student Program: Paying Host Families

**The Department has determined that, as a matter of policy, host families should not be paid for their hosting of exchange students.**

Secondary School Student exchange programs have been part of U.S. public diplomacy efforts since 1949. These programs promote mutual understanding by providing foreign students the opportunity to study in American high schools while living with an American host family. Not only are the students themselves transformed by these experience, so, too, are their families, friends, and teachers back home. Americans, such as the host families, students, and sponsor representatives whose lives intersect with these students benefit as well.

Historically, this program has been carried out through the use of voluntary host families. However, the Department has learned that some sponsors are currently or intending to soon begin compensating American families to host secondary school students. Existing regulations governing this category of exchange do not specifically address payment of host families. Concerns have been raised by several sponsors regarding this practice and the Department, in responses to these concerns, canvassed the Secondary School Student exchange community requesting their comment on this practice. There are 102 organizations designated by the Department to conduct Secondary School Student exchange programs. Fifty of these entities provided comment. Of these, 10 organizations indicated that they were currently paying host families or believed that host families should be paid. The remaining 40 sponsors opposed the payment of host families, citing that paying host families would not serve the program well and that the long-term success of the current model is based on the relationship between the participant and the host family, the success of which is the result of an act of generosity and citizenship. We agree.

Many commenters also voiced the concern that the payment of host families would likely affect the attitude of American high schools toward the program. These sponsors believe that hosting would become a commercial transaction and schools would almost certainly view the program differently, and might be less willing to accept exchange students or grant tuition waivers. We agree.

If schools did not grant tuition waivers, this added cost would put the program out of reach economically for many foreign families. This outcome is counter to the Department's efforts to encourage participation by less elite and more socially and economically diverse populations.

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While the Department agrees that recruiting host families in a changing American social environment remains a major challenge, we have determined that paying American families to host students will have an overall negative effect upon our public diplomacy interests. Consequently, as a matter of policy, the Department has determined that host families should not be paid for their hosting of exchange students.

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